

AIR WAR COLLEGE

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THE BESIEGED FORTRESS:
MAKING SENSE OF RUSSIA'S ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA AND WHAT IT MEANS TO
U.S. POLICY MAKERS

by

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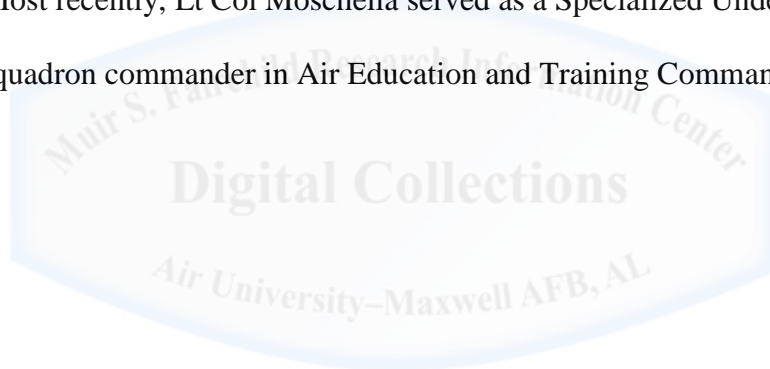
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Biography

Lt Col Robert J. Moschella is assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. He commissioned through AFROTC and graduated from the University of California, San Diego in 1998 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering. Lt Col Moschella completed Air Command and Staff College in 2010 with a Master's degree in Military Operational Art and Science, and in 2010 earned a second Master's degree in Aeronautical Science through Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. He has extensive operational experience in the Combat Air Forces as a B-1B bomber pilot and Air Liaison Officer, to include four combat deployments in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Most recently, Lt Col Moschella served as a Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training T-6A squadron commander in Air Education and Training Command.



Abstract

President Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine and annex the Crimean Peninsula in February, 2014 was influenced by numerous interrelated factors that stemmed from an overall desire to regain Russia's previous spheres of influence. In the months leading up to the invasion, the Ukrainian Euromaidan protests erupted and resulted in the sudden ouster of Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich. Following Yanukovich's fall, it appears that for Russia the benefits of an invasion outweighed the costs associated with violating Ukraine's sovereignty. In order to understand the relevant factors that influenced Putin's decision, it is necessary to understand the colorful history of the Russia-Ukraine-Crimea relationship, and view the conflict through various international relations theories. Nationalism, imperialism, irredentism, deterrence, diversionary war theory and just war theory provide valuable insight in that regard. In this paper, I offer three cost-benefit analysis models that explain how internal and external factors changed over time and ultimately influenced Putin's decision to engage in Ukraine. I argue that when the situation became favorable in early 2014, Putin annexed Crimea primarily to solidify domestic popularity and rally Russian popular support, and nationalist, imperialist, irredentist and diversionary themes best explain his actions.

By assessing Russia's current domestic situation and other potential conflict areas in the region, I predict that Russia's intention is to continue to destabilize eastern Ukraine via subtle means in order to create a new status quo favorable to Russia, and to defend against the contagion of western influence. As Putin's domestic approval ratings drop in the near-term due mostly to a struggling Russian economy, he will become more aggressive in his efforts to undermine western influence throughout Europe, short of a traditional military invasion. U.S. foreign policy should proactively shape the international environment through a balanced

approach using all instruments of power to increase the costs associated with Putin's expansionist world-view. In other words, the West should make Russian efforts to destabilize other nations more costly for President Putin. Specifically, U.S. policy with Russia should maintain diplomatic pressure to adhere to international norms, link economic sanctions and incentives to behavior, counter President Putin's information campaign, and employ a credible deterrence force supported by NATO and other partners.



Introduction

Academics and policymakers over the past two years have offered theories to explain why Russian President Vladimir Putin decided to annex the Crimean Peninsula in early 2014 and overtly support rebels in the eastern part of the country. Several plausible rationales have emerged: '*Putin the nationalist*' protected Mother Russia from expanding western ideology by rallying the nation around the flag. '*Putin the irredentist*' laid claim to valuable resources that rightly belonged to Russia. '*Putin the imperialist*' seized strategic terrain to expand power and defend against encroaching enemies. And finally, '*Putin the diversionist*' responded to domestic pressures to maintain control over those from whom he derives his true power--the Russian people. Driven to make Russia a great power again, I argue that Putin's decision to invade Ukraine and annex Crimea in February, 2014 was influenced by not one, but numerous factors simultaneously that evolved since the fall of the Soviet Union. I argue that when the situation became favorable in early 2014, Putin annexed Crimea primarily to solidify domestic popularity and rally Russian popular support, and nationalist, imperialist, irredentist and diversionary themes best explain his actions.

From a U.S. perspective, the factors that shaped Putin's foreign policy decisions in early 2014 offer valuable insight about how to best manage Russia today and into the future. I offer three cost-benefit analysis models that explain how internal and external factors changed over time and ultimately influenced Putin's decision to invade Ukraine. Additionally, I provide five lessons learned from the Russian invasion, followed by four recommendations for U.S. policy makers regarding Russian foreign policy. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of Russian historical ties to the eastern European region, I start my analysis with a brief summary of Russian-Ukraine-Crimea history.

Russia-Ukraine-Crimea History

The Crimean Peninsula has a colorful history, and understanding centuries of Russian influence in the region offers insight to U.S. foreign policy makers. The recorded history of the Crimean Peninsula begins in approximately the 5th century BC with Greek influence along the Black Sea coast, and over the course of two thousand years, it endured a long series of conquests and invasions by Romans, Goths, Huns, Turks and others.¹ From the latter portion of the 15th century through the late 18th century, Crimea was divided into two regions and controlled primarily by the Ottoman Empire.² With the signing of the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca in 1774, Crimea became an independent territory, although the Russian Empire maintained control over various Crimean cities. Following a period of instability and infighting between pro-Russian and pro-Turkish forces, Russia and Turkey signed the Treaty of Jassy in 1791, which ceded full control of Crimea to Russia.³ Following the Bolshevik Revolution and ensuing Russian civil war in 1921, the Crimean Peninsula became the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and part of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic.⁴ As of 1939, the peninsula was populated by an ethnically diverse population of Russians (50%), Ukrainians (14%), Crimean Tatars (19%) other smaller ethnic groups.⁵

Following World War II, Stalin's Soviet Red Army forcibly deported the Tatars and other minority ethnic groups from Crimea to modify the demographics of the peninsula for strategic reasons due to its location on the continent. In 1946, the Crimean Peninsula lost its autonomous status and fell under the full control of the Soviet Union. During the Cold War in 1954, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev issued a formal decree that transferred the Crimean Peninsula to Ukraine which was motivated by, "the commonality of the economy, the proximity, and close economic and cultural relations between the Crimean region and the Ukrainian SSR."⁶ This

transfer remains one of the most controversial acts in post-war Soviet history based on the skepticism shared at the time by lower level Soviet party members, the Russian population, and the Crimeans that the peninsula rightly belonged to Russia based on ethnic, religious and historical factors.⁷ Finally, during the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Crimean Peninsula became part of a newly independent Ukraine by formal referendum.⁸ During the ensuing Belovezha Accords negotiations, Russian President Yeltsin raised the issue of Crimea ownership but decided against forcing the issue as Ukraine's new President Kravchuk was unwilling to concede the peninsula at the time, however agreed to other Russian policy demands that kept Ukraine within a Russian sphere of influence and allowed Russia to keep the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol.⁹

During the 1990's and 2000's, Russia focused on maintaining influence in Ukrainian politics and controlling the Black Sea Fleet, but also respected Ukraine's sovereignty as evidenced in the signing of the 1997 Russian-Ukrainian Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership, that obligated both parties to, "respect each other's territorial integrity and confirm the inviolability of the existing borders between them."¹⁰ In 2004, Ukraine was rocked by the Orange Revolution as a determined middle class came together to successfully stop the ruling elite from falsifying an election and hijacking Ukraine's presidency.¹¹ Prior to the 2014 annexation, the last formal Russia-Ukraine agreement regarding Crimea occurred during the Kharkov Accords in 2010, that formalized the extension of the Black Sea Fleet's lease of Crimean bases until 2042 in return for a 30 percent discount on the price of Russian gas supplies.¹²

In November 2013, the Euromaidan protest movement began in Kiev after Russian-leaning Ukrainian President Yanukovych suspended the signing of the Ukraine-European Union

Association Agreement. The movement quickly gained strength and ultimately led to a violent Ukrainian revolution and the ouster of President Yanukovych in late February, 2014.¹³ President Yanukovych's removal sparked demonstrations on the Crimean peninsula as Pro-Russian Ukrainians protested Crimean Prime Minister Anatolli Mohyliov's recognition of, and subordination to, Kiev's provisional government. Within days, Russian forces wearing unmarked uniforms were reported across the peninsula and the annexation of Crimea was officially established by formal referendum on March 16, 2014.

The seemingly arbitrary decision by President Khrushchev to transfer ownership of Crimea to Ukraine for the first time in its history set into motion an interesting chain of events regarding the control of this strategically valuable piece of terrain. While undoubtedly seeking to influence Kiev's strategic decision-making, prior to the 2014 annexation, Putin clearly recognized the legal and sovereign integrity of Ukraine as evidenced by several contemporary treaties and agreements between the two countries. Thus, contrary to popular belief, the annexation of Crimea was not the result of a lengthy legal, diplomatic or political effort over time to reclaim Russian land, but in reality was driven by Putin's short-term desire to distract his nation's attention from a deplorable situation at home. In the following analysis, I will evaluate several major international relations theories and their relevance to this issue, and will argue that more went into Putin's calculus to invade Ukraine and annex Crimea in February 2014 than what surface details offer.

International Relations Theories

From a theoretical perspective, nationalism, imperialism, irredentism, deterrence, diversionary war theory and just war theory all play important roles in understanding the Russian-Ukrainian-Crimea conflict. These six theories are helpful in explaining the important factors that led to Putin's decision to annex Crimea in 2014. In the following analysis, I describe how each theory influenced Putin's decision to annex Crimea, and deduce that Putin's primary concern in early 2014 was to improve domestic support. Overwhelmingly, to improve his popularity among Russians, Putin mainly fits diversionary war theory, which asserts that leaders rally the nation against a common enemy to divert attention away from domestic troubles while justifying their actions to the world through various narratives. Analysis of the theories transposed against this contemporary setting will allow me to propose three cost-benefit analysis models to demonstrate the pros and cons associated with Putin's decision to suddenly violate the sovereignty of Ukraine.

Diversionary War Theory – *Putin the Diversionist: A Moscow Maidan?*

According to diversionary war theory, problematic domestic circumstances motivate a country's leader to divert popular discontent by launching a militarized international crisis.¹⁴ As such, Putin's desire to distract his countrymen from Russia's poor domestic state of affairs in early 2014 was the primary driver behind his decision to invade Ukraine. Prior to the invasion, Putin's domestic approval ratings were at an all-time low, and out of desperation, he approved Crimea's infiltration to divert the public's attention away from a failing economy, to demonstrate legitimacy of his government, and to rally the nation against a common enemy – the spread of Western ideology. The practice of diversionary war theory to bolster domestic popularity is not new for Putin or other state leaders. For example, some argue that Saddam Hussein exercised

diversionary foreign policy when he invaded Kuwait in the First Gulf War in response to significant domestic and political hardships.¹⁵ In Russia, the effect on the public caused by the diversion is multiplied by Russia's strict control over the media that allows the government to shape the internal message to the people.¹⁶ As a new president, Putin moved quickly to dominate the media landscape in Russia, putting not only state media but privately-owned broadcast media under the Kremlin's influence.¹⁷ "There should be patriotically-minded people at the head of state information resources," Putin told reporters at his 2013 annual news conference, "people who uphold the interests of the Russian Federation. These are state resources. That is the way it is going to be."¹⁸ Regarding the Ukraine-Crimea situation, by limiting media coverage to, "talk of fascists, of gangs of unknown armed men, of coups and self-determination and persecution," throughout Ukraine, Putin was successful in convincing the Russian public that the annexation of Crimea in 2014 was the only feasible course of action to maintain order.¹⁹

Putin is no stranger to the concept of diversionary war theory. Since his rule, Putin's approval rating reached a lofty 80 percent at least three times, and each time the spike was associated with military interventions: Chechnya in 1999, Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014.²⁰ According to Levada Center Russian polling data, due to a poor Russian economy prior to the invasion of Ukraine, Putin's popularity was in significant decline, "from a protracted peak of close to 90 percent approval ratings in 2007-2008 to ratings situated in the low or mid-60s consistently from the spring of 2012 on."²¹ Additionally, when Putin's ratings stagnated at their lowest point in late 2011 and early 2012, thousands of Russian protesters took to the streets in Moscow demanding his resignation and begging for government reform to improve the economy.²² Furthermore, having just witnessed the fall of numerous state leaders across the Middle East during the Arab Spring movement, the widespread Russian protests had a profound

impact on Putin, who quickly enacted measures to silence the public and restrict opposition. Moscow responded to protestors by further decreasing the civil liberties of Russian citizens through anti-public dissent legislation and systematically neutralizing protest organizers.²³ By early 2014, the regime had exhausted all “peaceful” methods of appeasing the masses. “Neither the 2012 election campaign nor the 2014 Sochi Olympics could boost Putin’s support by more than 3 to 4 percentage points.”²⁴ From Putin’s perspective, something more had to be done.

To add fuel to Russia’s domestic fire, in the months leading up to the invasion, Ukraine found itself in an economic tug-of-war between the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation. This ultimately led to the Euromaidan revolution, another hit to Russia’s struggling economy and a spike in Putin’s frustration level. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Ukraine vacillated between Western-leaning and Russian-leaning governments and endured years of corruption and slow economic growth which eventually led to the 2004 Orange Revolution and a desire for economic assistance from the EU. In late 2013, Yanukovych pursued long-term economic stability by committing to an association agreement with the EU which would provide them with much needed funds in return for liberalizing reforms. President Yanukovych initially announced his intention to sign the agreement, but ultimately refused to sign at the last minute which alarmed Ukrainians and sparked widespread opposition. In mid-December 2013, in midst of the protests, Yanukovych instead signed the Ukrainian-Russian action plan that agreed to allow Russia to buy \$15 billion of Ukrainian Eurobonds with the promise of lowering the cost of natural gas supplied to Ukraine.²⁵ Additionally, the Russian deal relinquished Crimea’s Kerch peninsula to the Russian Navy, granting Russia unquestionable access to Black Sea ports. The agreement between Yanukovych and Putin further infuriated most Ukrainians who preferred closer economic ties with the EU as opposed to Russia. The

Euromaidan protests eventually led to Yanukovych's ouster which nullified the Russian-Ukrainian agreement and dashed a much needed trade agreement with Ukraine along with access to the Black Sea. However, more importantly Putin was forced to accept that there were clear limits to his power as the people of Ukraine, clearly within a desired Russian sphere of influence, were capable of self-determination by pursuing closer ties with the West instead of with Russia.

Putin's history shows that he has a proclivity to aggression with his neighbors when concerned with domestic support, and in 2014, he used Ukraine to breathe new life into his popularity. "He's [annexing Crimea] to strengthen his position back home," said Alexie Malashenko, a security expert at Moscow's Carnegie Center. "It's effective, it rallies the people around him, and it's normal behavior."²⁶ Polling data taken following the annexation shows that Putin's diversionary tactics seemed to have worked, as Russians took their minds off their struggling economy and positioned themselves resolutely behind their leader.²⁷ Following the formal announcement of Crimea's annexation to the nation, Putin's approval rating soared to nearly 90 percent and has remained in the stratosphere until only recently.²⁸ According to some Russian outsiders, "The political system's legitimacy crisis, of which the mass protests of 2011-2012 were an indication, was finally resolved. The annexation of Crimea in early 2014 proved to be a turning point for the regime of Russian President Putin. The Kremlin was able to reverse the downward trend in its approval ratings that had persisted for the preceding four to five years."²⁹

Irredentism – Putin the Irredentist: This is Russki Land!

Irredentism is the effort to reunify lost territory inhabited by ethnic kin with its motherland. Putin's decision to annex Crimea in 2014 was in part motivated by, and rationalized through, irredentism that materialized through the idea of reclaiming historic Russian lands that were inhabited by ethnic Russians. For nearly a decade, irredentist trends had been on the rise in

Russia and acted as an engine fueling hostile sentiment toward the west, as well as with some of her neighbors.³⁰ During a 2008 NATO summit meeting in Bucharest, a source claimed that President Putin mentioned to President Bush, “You don’t understand, George, Ukraine is not even a state.”³¹ Which infers that Putin believes that Ukraine rightly belongs to Russia, and only appears to be a sovereign state based on a poor historical decision made by a defunct Soviet ruler. Additionally, in the days leading up to the invasion, many Crimeans took to the streets to express their pro-Russian sentiment which played a role in influencing Putin’s decision-making. For example, large public rallies held in Crimea in February 2014, were full of Russian flags and separatist slogans; pro-Russian organizations called for a local self-defense militia; and an impromptu Crimean popular assembly adopted a decision not to recognize decrees from the newly formed government in Kiev.³² As such, Putin publicly based his decision for invasion on the defense of ethnic Russians in Crimea against nationalist Ukrainians, and mass protests by pro-Russian separatists on the peninsula created a more favorable situation for invasion.

Following the annexation of Crimea, Putin increased his Russian ethnic irredentist rhetoric when addressing the country and referred to Crimea as, ‘historically Russian land.’³³ In President Putin’s Kremlin speech to Parliament on March 18, 2014, instead of using the normal term ‘Rossisskii’ which refers to both ethnic and non-ethnic Russians living in the Russian state, he specifically chose the word, ‘Russkii’ to refer in the Russian language to someone who is ethnically Russian.³⁴ To Parliament Putin exclaimed, “Crimea is primordial ‘Russkaya’ land, and Sevastopol is a ‘Ruskii’ city” and went on to say, “Kiev is the mother of ‘Russskie’ cities.”³⁵ Whether Putin was actually motivated by irredentism or just used irredentist themes to justify the invasion is debatable, however the last two years have shown that the idea of re-capturing Russian soil resonated with the country and boosted Putin’s public approval ratings.³⁶

Nationalism – *Putin the Nationalist: We are Russkis!*

Nationalism is a shared group feeling in the significance of a geographic region seeking independence for its culture and ethnicity that holds the group together.³⁷ The opportunity to act as guardian angel to Crimea's staunchly pro-Russian population influenced President Putin's decision to annex the peninsula. Moreover, it offered him a convenient storyline to justify the invasion of a sovereign nation. Historically, ethnic Russians have comprised approximately half of Crimea's population, and 2014 post-annexation census numbers reported that 1.4 million Russians lived in Crimea, equating to 65% of the population.³⁸ Within the decade preceding annexation, concern for Russians living in the near abroad gained importance within Russian foreign policy. In 2005, Putin stated that the fall of the USSR, "for the Russian people, became a real drama. Tens of millions of our citizens and countrymen found themselves outside Russian territory."³⁹ Specifically regarding Ukraine, Putin declared that there, "will live millions of ethnic Russians ... and Russia will always defend their interests with political, diplomatic and legal means."⁴⁰ In sum, Putin's foreign policy alleges concern for ethnic Russians living outside Russian territory, but as witnessed with the anti-Russian policies of the Baltics, Putin has demonstrated willingness to act in their defense only when doing so satisfies a greater Russian interest such as increasing public support of the nation, as was needed in early 2014.

Imperialism – *Putin the Imperialist: NATO Nyet!*

According to imperialist theory, a country's leader is motivated to acquire or control territory through diplomatic or military means to increase its national power. Putin's decision to annex Crimea and undermine the stability of Ukraine was driven in part by imperialist ambitions to extend his national power through the capture and control of strategic terrain and to secure

unfettered access to the Black Sea Fleet. Formal relations between NATO and Ukraine began in the early 1990's and over the years developed into a substantial partnership as demonstrated by Ukraine being the only partner to have actively contributed to all NATO-led operations.⁴¹ Thus, over time Putin's confidence in his ability to maintain a strong Russian sphere of influence on his western border combined with long-term and unchallenged access to the Black Sea slowly deteriorated. Although Ukraine in early 2014 was not on the verge of becoming a NATO member, Ukrainian leadership demonstrated increased support of NATO activities and coordination in the years leading up to the annexation. Putin's desire to expand Russian influence in 2014 was in part motivated by the expansion of NATO and western ideology into eastern Europe throughout the decade preceding the invasion. Although we will never know the true extent that imperialist ambition shaped Putin's decision to annex Crimea, the invasion secured Russia's long-term ability to project force into the Black and Mediterranean Seas regardless of Ukrainian relations, and increased Russia's ability to counter NATO expansion.

Just War Theory - Putin the Just One: I Follow the Rules!

Just war theory refers to conditions under which states are justified to go to war (*jus ad bellum*) and describes appropriate behavior in war (*jus in bello*). Under just war theory, a legitimate state authority may rightfully go to war in self-defense, in pursuit of peace, for the right intention, after exhausting peaceful alternatives, with reasonable hope of achieving its objectives, with proportionality, and following a declaration of hostilities.⁴² Both *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* underpin international law and normative behavior between states which, prior to February 2014, served as a counter-balance to Putin's aggression toward his neighbors. Within the spirit of just war theory, article two of the United Nations Charter specifies, "All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial

integrity or political independence of any state.”⁴³ Following Russia’s annexation of Crimea, many countries and supranational bodies, to include NATO, condemned Putin’s decision to deviate from international law by violating Ukraine’s territorial sovereignty regardless of his claims to the peninsula. For example, following the invasion, Albania’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement condemning the military intervention of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, in defiance of the norms of international law and in violation of the territorial sovereignty and integrity of the country.⁴⁴ In response to widespread backlash, Putin offered the Security Council and international media, a series of unsubstantiated claims that Russia was acting within the scope of international law to protect Russians and to honor a Crimean referendum to separate from Ukraine.⁴⁵ We will never know for sure how much just war theory contributed to preventing Russia from invading Ukraine leading up to 2014, however international state sovereignty laws provided a norm by which the international community can exclaim dissent and to justify economic sanctions against an invading state.

Deterrence Theory – *Putin the Deterred: Don’t Punish Me!*

Deterrence is a traditional international relations theory that rests on the premise that a state’s action will elicit a response resulting in unacceptable damage that would outweigh any potential benefit.⁴⁶ By its very nature deterrence is a theory of defense that uses the threat of force to deter or prevent another party from doing something.⁴⁷ Leading up to February 2014, Putin was deterred from invading Ukraine for fear of incurring unacceptable military losses. As general readiness levels of Ukrainian military forces gradually decayed over time, Russia became more confident in the ability of their special forces to accomplish an incursion into eastern Ukraine and occupy the Crimean Peninsula within manageable risk levels. Additionally, the Euromaidan revolution caused confusion which prevented Ukraine from maintaining

command and control of their military forces.⁴⁸ Immediately following the ouster of President Yanukovych, a report of Ukrainian military strength to the interim government specified, “only 6,000 troops of the 41,000-strong Army were ready for action ... the rest of the Ukrainian troops, including those stationed in Crimea, proved unable to respond to the unexpected military threat.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, based on the limited troop levels stationed in eastern Europe in 2014 and the commitment level of its forces across the globe, Putin felt confident that the U.S. would likely not intervene militarily in a hybrid warfare-style invasion.

A second factor that concerned Putin regarding a general invasion of Ukraine was the international condemnation he was sure to receive from the international community. However, as the Ukrainian government slowly lost control of the country during the weeks leading up to the invasion, Putin attempted to minimize the severity of international backlash by capitalizing on Kiev’s instability and creating a storyline that he was compelled to intervene to maintain order and save his countrymen. Following the invasion, the U.S., along with many other nations, responded vigorously to Russian action that clearly violated international law. The U.S. reacted by increasing support of the Ukrainian government, imposing economic sanctions on Russia, and further reassuring NATO allies.⁵⁰ Additionally, the EU imposed long-term economic sanctions that continue to damage the Russian economy today. We will never know for sure how much deterrence theory contributed to preventing Putin from invading Ukraine leading up to 2014, however the impact to Russia’s economy alone through economic sanctions and increased international isolation following the invasion will have a detrimental impact on Putin’s ability to achieve greater power status. In the next section, I will present three cost-benefit analysis models which are segmented for the periods of 1991-2012, 2013, and early 2014. The purpose of the

models is to show how factors evolved over time following the dissolution of the Soviet Union that eventually led to Putin's decision to annex Crimea.

Cost-Benefit Analysis Model

Putin's decision to annex Crimea in 2014 was driven by a complex relationship of interdependent and dynamic factors, and can best be described through a cost-benefit analysis model that compares 'Factors for Invasion' to 'Factors Against Invasion' during three separate time periods. The four 'Factors for Invasion' and three 'Factors Against Invasion' originate from international relations theories set against the contextual strategic elements of geography, history, alliances and economics. In the model, I define 'Factors for Invasion' as subjective forces that compel the Russian President to make the decision to invade Ukraine. Likewise, I define 'Factors Against Invasion' as subjective forces that restrain the Russian President from deciding to invade Ukraine. Over time, various factors cause these forces to expand and contract, which I illustrate as larger and smaller vectors within the model. The size of the arrow represents a subjective level of influence of each factor for or against invasion. The red container at the center of the model represents the decision to invade Ukraine and annex Crimea, and over time is influenced by the aforementioned factors. Stage 1 illustrates 1991-2012, a period of relative stability following the fall of the Soviet Union. Stage 2 illustrates 2013, a period of growing instability between Russia and Ukraine. Stage 3 illustrates February 2014, when the Euromaidan revolution exacerbated strained relations between Russia and Ukraine and resulted in Putin's decision to invade Ukraine.

Stage 1: 1991-2012

Figure 1 below shows that in the years preceding the invasion (1991-2012), Putin's motivation to invade Ukraine and annex Crimea was mostly influenced by diversionary war theory, irredentism, nationalism, and imperialism. By combining these theories with Russia-Ukraine contextual strategic elements such as geography, regional history, alliances and economics, I conclude that Putin was primarily motivated to rally domestic support, reclaim Russian lands, rescue Russians abroad, and acquire strategic terrain. However, prior to February 2014, Putin's desire to invade Ukraine was balanced by just war theory and deterrence theory which drove him to maintain the status quo in order to avoid international condemnation, economic sanctions, and damage to Russian military forces. In other words, prior to 2013, Putin assessed the strategic risk of invasion as unacceptably high.

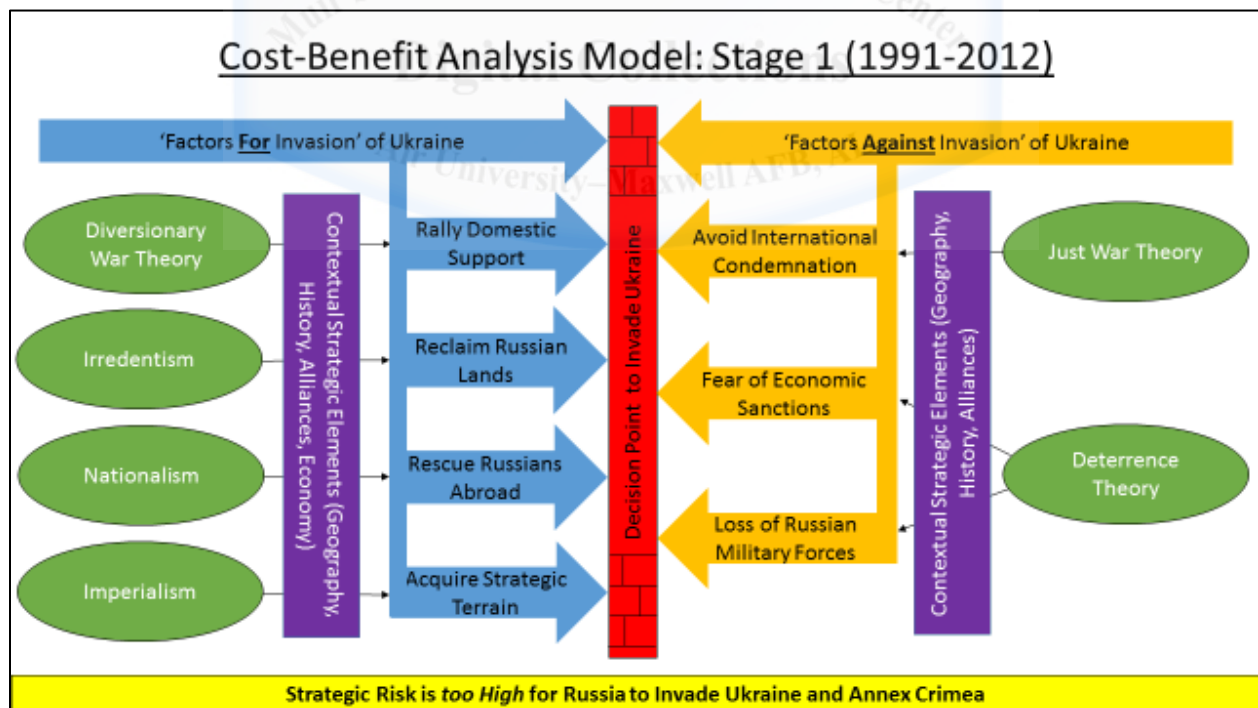


Figure 1

Stage 2: 2013

In 2013, numerous factors continued to evolve that resulted in an imbalance between the ‘Factors for Invasion’ and ‘Factors Against Invasion.’ However, the factor that most significantly contributed to the cost-benefit imbalance was the continued stagnation of Putin’s low domestic approval rating.

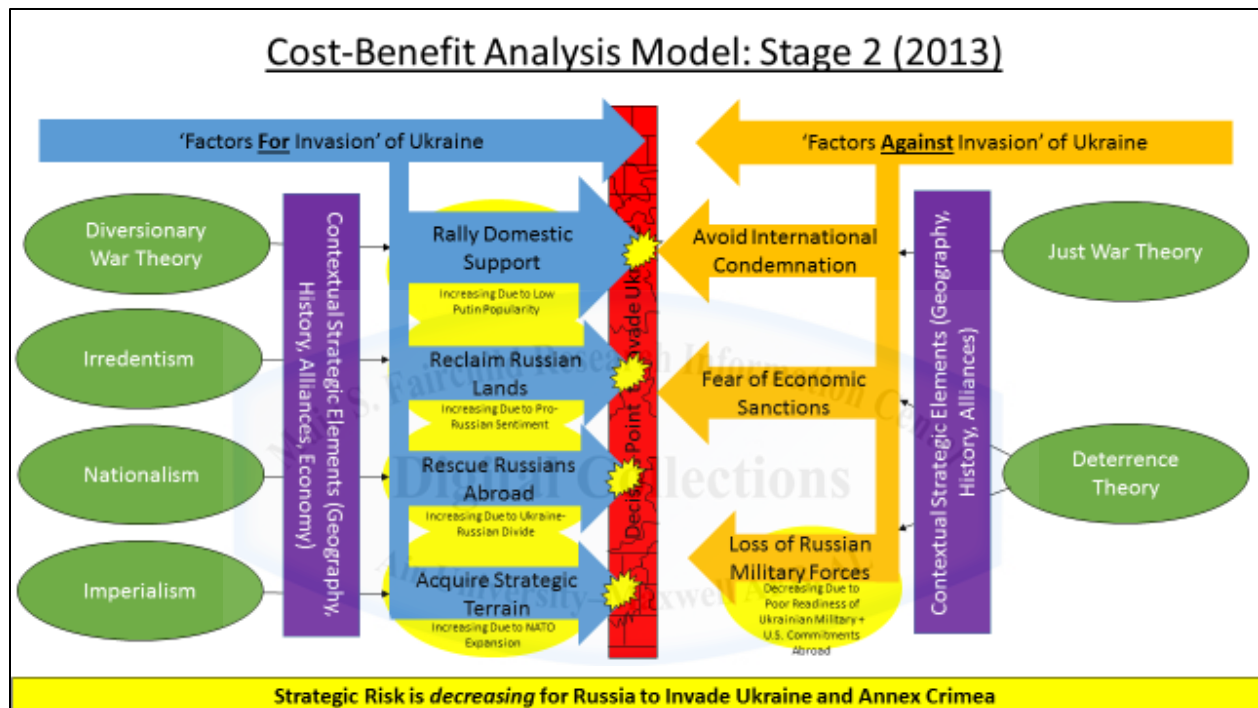


Figure 2

Prior to the 2014 invasion, Putin increasingly desired to rally domestic support:

In the two years preceding the invasion, Russia’s domestic situation deteriorated and Putin became increasingly desperate to rally the nation around a cause to increase his popularity and restore faith in the Russian government. Within the shadow of the Arab Spring, in early 2012, thousands of Russians took to the streets of Moscow and other cities wearing white symbolic ribbons and chanting, “Russia without Putin!” With rising prices and economic

slowdown in 2013, Putin's domestic approval rating stagnated at 63%, its lowest point in over a decade. Regarding Russia's economy, after achieving a respectable 3-4% growth rate in the 2000's, things sharply decelerated in 2012, and in 2013 Russia's economy saw growth at less than half the year's previous pace, thus decelerating for a fourth year in a row and destroying any hope left about a consumption-driven economy.⁵¹ In late 2013, the ruble touched a four-year low and according to Levada polling data, many Russians saw little prospect for positive change in the country and waves of Russians sought emigration out of the country.⁵² The domestic state of affairs grew steadily worse for Putin as 2013 came to a close as he witnessed neighboring Ukraine erupt with revolutionary fervor as liberals, nationalists, leftists and thousands of 'ordinary people' united to drive their pro-Moscow president from power. As 2014 began, Putin was dangerously desperate to divert his nation's attention away from the dismal situation at home and rally his nation around a common interest.

Prior to the 2014 invasion, Putin increasingly desired to reclaim former Russian lands:

In the years leading up to the invasion, Putin attempted to rally his countrymen around the flag by increasing his irredentist rhetoric and fomenting ideas of acquiring rightfully Russian lands to the west. According to a Romir, a Russian survey agency, Russian irredentism has been on the rise since the fall of the Soviet Union, and Putin used it as an engine for aggression and expansionist intentions, as he demonstrated in the 2008 Georgian War.⁵³ In 2013, a Levada Center poll found, "Sixty-six percent of Russians agreed to some degree that 'Russia is for Russians.'"⁵⁴ Regarding the Ukraine situation, also in 2013, Putin stated, "...Russia and Ukraine are ... essentially one people ... We have a common tradition, common mentality, common history, and common culture."⁵⁵ However, Putin's conception of the Russian nation could not accommodate all of present-day Ukraine, due to western Ukraine's European influence, thus

prior to the invasion, Putin applied his focus on pro-Russian Crimea and southeast Ukrainian regions. As 2014, Russia's 'Year of Culture' began, Putin capitalized on a growing trend in Russian irredentism to both motivate and justify action in Ukraine to re-establish formal ownership of historically Russian land.

Prior to the 2014 invasion, Putin increasingly desired to rescue Russians abroad:

With a surge in nationalism in the years leading up to the invasion, Putin became more interested in the welfare of his fellow countrymen living outside Russia, and increased the aggressiveness in his rhetoric to make it known that any attack on Russians abroad would be considered the same as an attack on the homeland. The Euromaidan protests in late 2013 demanded Ukrainian alignment with the West, but simultaneously provided Putin with an opening to apply external pressure and ultimate incursion to aid Crimean Russians who were allegedly targeted by the Ukrainian right-wing radicals. Civil unrest on the peninsula steadily increased in early 2014 with violent clashes between pro-Russian separatists and Crimean Tatars leading to the deaths of three individuals and the organization of self-defense militias to protect ethnic Russians.⁵⁶ During his March 18, 2014 address to the Russian government, Putin justified his actions by stating, "those who opposed the [Euromaidan] coup were immediately threatened with repression. Naturally, the first in line here was Crimea, the Russian-speaking Crimea. In view of this, the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol turned to Russia for help in defending their rights and lives."⁵⁷

Prior to the 2014 invasion, Putin increasingly desired to acquire strategic terrain:

Leading up to the invasion, Putin became more aggressive in his desire to expand his sphere of influence westward to include Crimea in response to Ukraine's cooperation with NATO and the EU. Even though Ukraine in 2010 agreed to extend the Black Sea port lease until

2042, according to a source close to Oleg Belaventsev, the commander of Russia's military operation in Crimea, "[Russia] was definitely worried that the Ukrainians would cancel the [Russian] lease on [the naval base in] Sevastopol and kick out the Black Sea Fleet."⁵⁸

Additionally, in 2012, NATO initiated the Defense Education Enhancement Program with Ukraine and in early 2013, NATO defense ministers formally agreed to reinforce long-term NATO-Ukraine cooperation. Furthermore, that same year Ukraine became the first partner country to contribute a ship to NATO counter-piracy operations in Somalia.⁵⁹ Russia's concern of NATO expansion, and with it, the encroachment of western ideals into eastern Europe had been a contentious issue for decades, and when thousands of Ukrainians flooded the streets in late 2013 demanding a western European way of life, Moscow interpreted this as a direct threat to its sphere of influence. As 2014 began, Putin was increasingly interested in acquiring strategic terrain to improve his position against what he perceived was a slow but steady creep of western hard and soft power toward his border which served as both an external and internal threat to his power.

Prior to 2014, Putin wanted to avoid international condemnation and he feared economic sanctions that would result from an invasion:

Due to his failing popularity and deteriorating economy in 2013, the last thing Putin needed was increased international isolation and economic sanctions that were sure to occur as a result of provocation against his neighboring state. As owner of the world's most corrupt major economy, Putin understood that if business ties with the West further deteriorated, Russia risked long-term sluggishness in economic growth that would increase its dependence on oil and gas exports and force the state to retain strict control over the economy. This desire to avoid consequences that would have a drastic impact on the already struggling Russian population

provided an effective counterbalance to Putin's growing desire to invade Ukraine and claim Crimea as Russian territory.

Prior to 2014, Putin became less concerned with a loss of Russian military forces that an invasion would cause:

In the years leading up to the invasion, Putin became less concerned with the damage Russian military forces would withstand during an invasion, due to the steady decline of Ukraine's military capability and readiness. Upon its independence in 1991, Ukraine possessed the second most powerful fighting forces in Europe, behind Russia, and the fourth most powerful in the world.⁶⁰ Ukraine inherited a huge conventional military from the former Soviet Union that consisted of over three-quarters of a million personnel and a vast array of modern Soviet land, air and naval equipment.⁶¹ However, in the 1990s, like many other former Soviet republics, Ukraine implemented massive military cuts and gradually dismantled its military machine, which started the country on a trajectory it would not reverse.⁶² For example in 2008, leaked reports indicated, "only 31 of Ukraine's 112 fighter jets, 10 of its 24 bombers, and eight of its 36 ground attack aircraft were operational."⁶³ Over the course of 22 years, short-sided political decisions, internal corruption, mismanagement of resources, and the 2008 global recession resulted in the gradual degradation of one of the most powerful militaries in the world to an incoherent fighting force.⁶⁴ Equally as concerning, many of Ukraine's military personnel stationed in Crimea prior to 2014 were born and raised in Crimea, and identified themselves as pro-separatists and thus were not eager to fight for Ukraine against Russia.⁶⁵ Leading up to 2014, the Ukrainian military was not prepared for a military conflict with any nation, especially its Russian neighbor...and Putin knew it.

Stage 3: February 2014

On February 22, 2014 pro-Russian Ukrainian President Yanukovich was ousted from power during the Euromaidan revolution, and fled the country to Russia. His sudden removal was one of the most critical events of President Putin's presidency. With the ouster of Yanukovich, Putin was once again forced to accept that western ideology had become stronger on his western border, and he was powerless to defend against it. Additionally, lingering in Putin's mind was the threat of contagion of mass protest across borders that had been a widespread feature of recent unrest across the globe, including the Color Revolutions in Eastern Europe and the Arab Spring movements.⁶⁶ Therefore, Putin most likely considered the possibility of a successful social movement in Ukraine increasing the likelihood of unrest in Russia, since both countries share similar historical, socio-economic, and political characteristics. In Putin's mind, with Yanukovich ousted, a Moscow Maidan may be next.

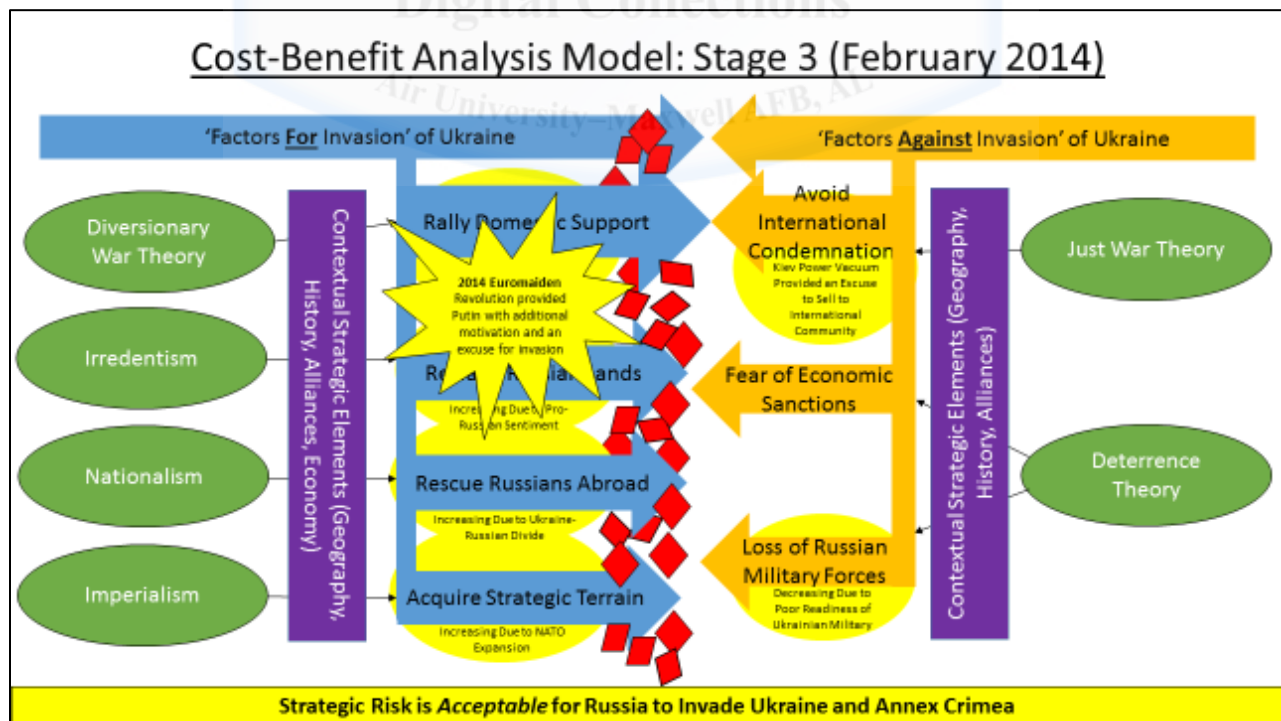


Figure 3

Following Yanukovych's demise, Putin's desire to **rally domestic support, reclaim Russian lands, rescue Russians abroad, and acquire strategic terrain** spiked significantly overnight. At the same time, Yanukovych's sudden departure left a power vacuum in Kiev. This disorder gave Putin a window of opportunity to attempt to rationalize his annexation of Crimea to the rest of the world in terms of providing order to the region, thus potentially **softening international condemnation** and **decreasing economic sanctions**. Additionally, the Euromaidan revolution and Yanukovych's ouster temporarily derailed the command and control of the military and further **degraded Ukrainian combat capability**. Therefore, Putin's unplanned decision to invade Ukraine and annex Crimea, can ultimately be traced to the fall of his client Yanukovych at the hands of a pro-western population, which served as the final match that ignited a growing imbalance between 'Factors for Invasion' and 'Factors Against Invasion.' Within days of Yanukovych's departure from Kiev, Russian forces were reported across the peninsula and quickly seized control of Crimean government buildings and soon formalized the action by referendum.

Lessons Learned from Crimea and a Prediction of Putin's Future Behavior

1. Putin views himself as a contemporary Peter the Great, and his grand strategy is to make Russia a great Empire once again. However, unfortunately for him, the post-Cold War political order stands in the way of that goal. To realize his dream, Putin lusts for the genuine support of the Russian people but is willing to employ cruel and tyrannical tactics to restrict individual freedoms in order to suppress internal opposition. In the near-term, Putin seeks a sphere of influence that consists of states that both oppose European ideals and embrace policies consistent with Moscow. Specifically, Putin desires a weak and compliant Ukrainian neighbor that will look east toward Moscow, not west toward Europe for support. In the long-term, Putin seeks to control and/or influence greater Eurasia as well as challenge American global leadership.

2. Ukraine serves as a buffer state of great strategic importance to Russia to protect, not necessarily against invading armies in the traditional sense, but from the invasion of western democratic norms. Historically, Ukraine was dominated by Napoleonic France, imperial Germany, and Nazi Germany to strike at Russia, and now Putin defends against a multitude of encroaching ideas that are different from his vision for the country.

3. In today's globalized world, Putin knows that maintaining the support of the Russian people will be harder to achieve. Thus, he views any challenge to his reputation, the loyalty of the Russian people, or the legitimacy of the Russian government as a threat to national security. Putin will continue to limit freedom of information and wage an internal information campaign to spread misinformation with the purpose of controlling the Russian narrative to his advantage.

The two 1917 Russian Revolutions serve as reminders to Putin of the power of a dissatisfied Russian population to depose their leader.

4. Putin's near-term objective in Ukraine is to retain ownership of Crimea and continue to destabilize eastern Ukraine. Putin will remain unwilling to give up Crimea, or remove its forces and influence from eastern Ukraine, since that level of concession would provide an obvious victory to the West, and to those seeking political change through revolution. On the other hand, Putin has no desire to pay the long-term political, economic and military costs associated with an outright conventional invasion of Ukraine. Thus, maintaining a stalemated eastern Ukraine without rolling Russian tanks into Kiev serves Putin's best interest.

5. The surprising and overwhelming success of Putin's invasion using 'little green men' and their swift victory in Crimea will influence Russia's long-term strategy in eastern Europe and beyond. In the future, Putin will become more aggressive in waging a hybrid form of warfare that will fuse cross-domain operations to achieve tactical, operational, strategic and grand strategic objectives, while simultaneously attempting to control the Russian population. Putin will continue to use nationalism, imperialism and irredentism to motivate and justify Russian action to both internal and external audiences. Reflexive Control theory will serve as the foundation of Russia's future form of warfare, in which Putin will attempt to influence an enemy to make decisions that will be advantageous to Russia in the long-term.

U.S. Policy Recommendations

1. U.S. policy makers should view future Russian expansionist efforts through a cost-benefit analysis model to uncover developing trends toward aggressive action. Putin's decision to invade Ukraine and annex Crimea was based on the relationship between a complex set of interrelated pro versus con factors. Additionally, cost-benefit analysis will help to identify potential 'spark' situations that could upset the balance of power between Russia and her neighbors and lower the risk level associated with a future invasion to an acceptable level.

2. U.S. policy with Russia should maintain diplomatic pressure to adhere to international norms, tie economic sanctions and incentives to behavior, counter Putin's information campaign, and employ a capable deterrence force supported by NATO and partners. Foreign policy should shape the international environment through a balanced approach using all instruments of power to increase the costs associated with Putin's expansionist world-view. In other words, make a future Russian invasion or efforts to destabilize other nations too costly to be worthwhile.

3. U.S. policy should balance its aggressiveness of forcing Putin to concede, with its impact on the Russian population. Putin associates the continued encroachment of western institutions, such as NATO and the EU, with his ability to maintain the allegiance, popularity and confidence of his population. Additionally, Putin tends to increase aggression with his neighbors by employing diversionary war tactics when he perceives a threat to his domestic popularity. In other words, strict economic sanctions that severely undermine the quality of life of the Russian population, may force Putin to become more provocative in order to maintain or restore his domestic standing. Near-term U.S. policy efforts should focus on achieving Minsk Accord

milestones, while supporting the Ukrainian government and refusing to recognize an autonomous Crimea. Long-term U.S. policy should strive to minimize future Crimea-like opportunities for Russia, while attempting to influence the heart of the Russian population to pursue individual freedoms consistent with a western form of governance.

4. The U.S. Intelligence Community should develop indicators and warnings that span all instruments of power in order to identify Russian efforts to destabilize the current balance of power across the globe. Russia will increase the employment of information warfare against the West within a reflexive control framework in an attempt to undermine western influence in Eurasia and to distract the Russian population from an economically depressed situation



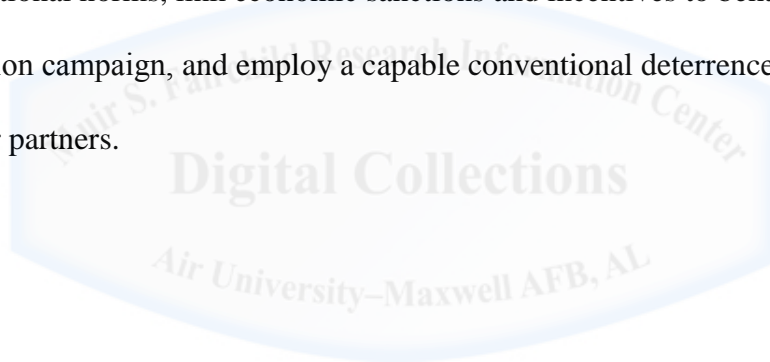
Conclusion

As the world watched from the sidelines in early 2014, President Putin publicly announced the formal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. In doing so, he violated international law and committed the first forced European takeover of another country's territory since World War II. Over the past two years, experts have offered a range of explanations for Putin's provocation in an attempt to predict future Russian action against her eastern European neighbors. I argue that when the situation became favorable in early 2014, Putin annexed Crimea primarily to solidify domestic popularity and rally Russian popular support as a diversion from a deteriorating domestic situation. In doing so, Putin used nationalist, imperialist and irredentist themes to justify his actions and to increase domestic approval ratings. I have used three cost-benefit analysis models to assess Putin's decision to invade Ukraine and annex Crimea, and have shown that he was driven by a complex relationship of interdependent factors that evolved over time since the fall of the Soviet Union.

President Putin is driven to reverse the actions of some of his post-Soviet predecessors, and wants to make Russia a great power once again. In early 2014, the ouster of his client, President Yanukovich, was a 'redline' since it demonstrated the power of the Ukrainian people, living within a Russian sphere of influence, to overthrow a pro-Russian government. Additionally, Putin is haunted by the ghosts of revolutions past, and thus rules with a tormenting paranoia that Russians will once again rise up in Red Square. Since Putin ultimately derives the preponderance of his power from the support of the people, Russia's primary existential threat is a threat posed by her people, not in the form of hard power, but in the form of contagion of western ideology. Therefore, Russian foreign policy, though seemingly unpredictable, is most

influenced by Putin's attempt to build and retain domestic support through nationalism, irredentism, imperialism and diversionary war theory.

As Putin's domestic approval ratings drop in the near-term due mostly to a struggling Russian economy, he will become more aggressive in his efforts to undermine western influence throughout Europe, short of a traditional military invasion. U.S. foreign policy should proactively shape the international environment through a balanced approach using all instruments of power to increase the costs associated with Putin's expansionist world-view. In other words, the West should make future Russian efforts to destabilize other nations too costly to be worthwhile. Specifically, U.S. policy with Russia should maintain diplomatic pressure to adhere to international norms, link economic sanctions and incentives to behavior, counter Putin's information campaign, and employ a capable conventional deterrence force supported by NATO and other partners.



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